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AN ANARCHIST INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL RACE THEORY

BY RACE (REVOLUTIONARY ANTI-AUTHORITARIANS OF COLOR)

Nuance theory:
View that one may determine the essential qualities of a group such as women, and that difference from that essential core may be treated as slight variations or shades of difference

Paradigm:
Reigning system of belief in a discipline that controls what is seen as possible, relevant, and valid

Perspectivism:
Belief that a person's or group's position or standpoint greatly influences how they see truth and reality

Principle of involuntary sacrifice:
The notion that costs of civil rights advances are always placed on blacks or low-income whites

Property interest in whiteness:
Idea that white skin and identity are economically valuable

Racial fraud & box checking:
Action on the part of a non-minority person, or one with a very slight connection with a minority group, to gain the benefit of minority status, as with affirmative action

Racial realism:
View that racial progress is sporadic and that people of color are doomed to experience only infrequent peaks followed by regression

Reconstruction:
Period when society is attempting to redress racial wrongs consistently and in thoroughgoing fashion

Restrictive covenant:
Legally enforceable limitation on land use or occupancy, often created by the original owner or developer of neighborhoods

Reverse discrimination:
Discrimination aimed at the majority group

Revisionist:
View of history or an event that challenges the accepted one

Stock stories:
Tales that a people commonly subscribe to and use to explain their social reality; for example, that African Americans who try hard will be accepted and succeed

Structural determinism:
Concept that a mode of thought or widely shared practice determines significant social outcomes, usually without our conscious knowledge

Transparency phenomenon:
Ability of whiteness to disguise itself and become invisible

False consciousness:
Phenomenon in which oppressed people internalize and identify with attitudes and ideology of the controlling class

Hegemony:
Domination by the ruling class, and unconscious acceptance of that state of affairs

Hypodescent:
"One-drop rule" that holds that anyone with any degree of discernible African ancestry is black

Immigrant analogy:
Belief that racialized minority groups, especially Latinos/as and Asians, will follow the same path of assimilation as white European ethnics

Indeterminancy:
Idea that legal reasoning rarely, if ever, has one right answer and that politics and social pressures on judged influence outcomes

Interest convergence:
Thesis pioneered by Derrick Bell that the majority group tolerates advances for racial justice only when it suits its interest to do so

Intersectionality:
Belief that individuals and classes often have shared or overlapping interests or traits

Legal realism:
Early-twentieth-century forerunner of critical legal studies, which disavowed mechanical jurisprudence in favor of social science, politics, and policy judgment

Legal storytelling:
Scholarship that focuses on the theory or practice of unearthing and replacing underlying rhetorical structures of the current social order, insofar as these are unfair to disenfranchised groups

Legitimacy:
Quality of an instruction, such as law, which is viewed as justified and worthy of respect

Liberalism:
Political philosophy that holds that the purpose of government is to maximize liberty; in civil rights, the view that law should enforce formal equality in treatment

Merit:
Individual worthiness; critical race scholars question the view that people may be ranked by merit and that distribution of benefits is rational and just

Microaggression:
Stunning small encounter with racism, usually unnoticed by members of the majority race

Model minority myth:
Idea that Asian Americans are hard-working, intelligent, and successful and that other groups should emulate them

Multiple consciousness:
Ability of people of color to perceive something in two or more ways, for example as a way a member of his or her group would see it and as a white would

Normative:
Of, pertaining to, or based on a norm, especially one regarded as broad or universal

Critical Race Theory starts by asking the same questions about race, racism and power that a myriad of academic disciplines and activists have pondered for the past century. It draws upon critical legal studies and radical feminism in the formation of its approach. While it is primarily concerned with the legal arena, it is activist in nature and has come to include political science, education, American and ethnic studies and more.

There is an entire trajectory represented by Critical Race Theory (CRT) that is far beyond the scope of either an introduction or a pamphlet. This means that we have made choices, both in which concepts we are choosing to highlight, and in what conclusions we are choosing to share in relation to the theory. Our choices reflect our personal stories, our cultural histories, and our history within RACE (the organization). We are choosing to share our positive experience with CRT (to date) as a way to inspire an anarchist theory of race, and to challenge the assumptions that we necessarily share a single vision of liberation, struggle, or oppression.

The simplest place to begin is by orienting ourselves around what we consider a primary concern of the CRT thinkers (or Crits as they are called), essentialism. If essentialism is, as they define it, the search for the unique essence of a group, then examples of essentialism are rampant throughout our society. Whether it is the 'profiling' by the police or Michael Moore's depiction of working class America, essentialism is usually experienced as the political convenience of the dominant society in categorizing aspects of the rest of society. The crits take this further and state "Essentialism has a political dimension... (T)he goals of a 'unified' group may not reflect exactly those of certain factions within it, yet the larger group benefits from their participation because of the increased numbers they bring... But what about the voices that do not fit into one category of oppression?"

Another concern of the Crits—appropriate for an understanding of the composition of social change—is the concept of interest convergence. This is the thesis that judicial progress only occurs when it suits the interest of dominant forces in society. Racial justice in the United States can be seen then as contingent on the generosity and magnanimity of white (or majoritarian) society. Derrick Bell makes this argument most pointedly in his review of Brown vs. Board of Education, making the claim that segregated schools served a malignant purpose for American foreign policy during the Cold War so that changing segregation was therefore an acceptable reform for dominant society.

Finally, CRT has had a running commentary on the phenomena of rights within jurisprudence that is worth examining. "Rights are almost always procedural (for example, to fair process) rather than substantive (for example, to food, housing, or education)... (R)ights are almost always cut back when they conflict with the interests of the powerful... (R)ights are said to be alienating. They separate people from each other... rather than encouraging them to form close, respectful communities... The group whom they supposedly benefit always greets cases like Brown with great celebration. But after the celebration dies down the great victory is quietly cut back by narrow interpretation, administrative obstruction, or delay."

This leads to an analysis of the victories of the Civil Rights Movement being, not a righting of wrongs, but a political convenience that very well may have served white society (being a possible description of dominant society) more than those who claimed victory. This is an entirely separate, but parallel, understanding to the perspective that says that the 'victory' was only possible in the context of the more radical aspirations of some being crushed by assassination, prison, and the process of assimilation. If the successes of the Civil Rights Movement have been primarily felt by

those who had political power prior to the movement, it has not prevented new politicians from arising as a consequence. The result is that these politicians use the compromised arguments that resulted in the CRM to work for social change today. The bar has been lowered.

The aspect of Critical Race Theory that sets it apart from a merely academic pursuit of an idealized justice (as difficult to actually find as to catch a fox by its tail) is its practical implications within legal scholarship. While that practice does not particularly inspire us as anarchists, the application of these critiques in the real world does. As a project we would set ourselves to articulate a necessarily anarchist theory of race with the motivation that such a clarity would encourage our actions along lines we actually found inspiring and not just due to the tradition of the Civil Rights Movement or the Black Panther Party. Which brings us to another concept of CRT, intersectionality, the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and the elevation of their interplay as separate and connecting disadvantaging factors. We (as in the contributors to this pamphlet) do not experience reality as one type of oppression, as one type of dominance. It is the intersection of our multiple oppressions and our process of figuring out how to survive in the face of those who would simplify our experience in the name of a false unity, which serves them, that drives the narrative of our lives.

FAQ

What is the relevance of theory when we are trying to build a movement?

This is a false dichotomy and serves to validate one form of transformative action while invalidating others. We have fundamental concerns with 'movement-building politics because our experience is that they are mired in a partisan, reformist, and political-in-a-bad-way tradition. However we also recognize the passion of many movement builders and the strategic possibilities in their efforts towards social change. If our goal is the transformation of society then we must work with people that have different views. What that looks like is far more complicated than trite calls to unity or for respecting differences, especially if it is in the name of 'the movement'.

How can we take Critical Race Theory and get something tangible and concrete out of it?

That is the project that we are interested in. The cooption of Civil Rights rhetoric by mainstream politicians and by the left has denatured it of its socially transformative powers. We have respect for that history, but recognize that in this time the political and cultural conditions have changed. We have to be challenging old ideas and moving on. CRT does both and informs our anarchist politic with a racial analysis that it has, to date, sorely lacked.

What's wrong with essentialism? If not essentialism then what?

Essentialism requires a search for the right unit for social analysis and change. Oppressed people have the fact that they are oppressed in common but the forms of that oppression vary from group to group. Thus, the political needs and strategies of social groups will differ. Liberals ignore problems of intersectionality and search for universals. An alternative to essentialism is that there is no such thing as inherent characteristics. No person has an easily stated identity; everyone has conflicting, overlapping identities and allegiances. We do not believe that all non-white people should compromise their differences and form a united front.

Critical Race Theory Glossary

Both this glossary and article would not have been possible without the book *Critical Race Theory—an introduction* by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic.

Bicultural education:
Pedagogical approach that encourages retention of a child's original or family culture

Binary paradigm of race:
Pattern of framing race issues in terms of two categories, such as black and white

Biological view of race:
Once popular view that humanity is divided into four or five major groups, corresponding to objective and real physical differences

Call to context:
Belief that social relations and truth require close attention to history, particularity, and experience

Color imagery:
Words, texts, and television images that associate skin color with traits such as innocence, criminality, or physical beauty

Countermajoritarianism:
View that the court system is free to strike down laws enacted by the majority that are unfair to minority groups

Counter-storytelling:
Writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority

Critical legal studies:
Legal movement that challenged liberalism from the Left, denying that law was neutral, that every case had a single correct answer, and that rights were of vital importance

Critique of rights:
Critical legal studies position that rights are alienating, ephemeral, and much less useful than most people think

Deconstruction:
Intellectual approach that targets traditional interpretations of terms, concepts, and practices, showing that they contain unsuspected meanings or internal contradictions

Determinism:
View that individuals and culture are products of particular forces, such as economics, biology, or the search for high status

Differential racialization:
Process by which racial and ethnic groups are viewed and treated differently by, mainstream society

Discourse:
Formal, extensive, oral or written treatment of a subject; the way we speak about something

Empathic fallacy:
Mistaken belief that sweeping social reform can be accomplished through speech and protest alone

Essentialism:
Search for the unique essence of a group

Eurocentricism:
Tendency to interpret the world in terms of European values and perspectives and the belief that they are superior

Exceptionalism:
Belief that a particular group's history justifies treating it as unique